



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
Maryland's Social Services Agency



MEDIA ADVISORY

For immediate release:

October 30, 2009

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**MARYLAND SCORES AN "A" IN PROTECTING THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF
ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN STATE CARE**

BALTIMORE – Maryland was one of only nine states to earn an A from two national non-profit organizations -- First Star and the Child Advocacy Institute -- for how well the state's laws protect the legal rights of abused and neglected children in dependency court.

The groups graded all 50 states and the District of Columbia on a range of criteria including: whether states mandate that attorneys be appointed for children in dependency proceedings; whether these attorneys represent the children in a client-directed manner; whether this representation continues throughout the case, including appeal; whether states have specialized education or training of a child's counsel; whether the child is given the legal status of a party to the proceedings; and whether rules pertaining to confidentiality and immunity from liability apply to attorneys representing these children.

Other states that earned an A include: Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Vermont, and West Virginia. Twenty-nine states earned Cs or lower. A full copy of the report is available at http://www.firststar.org/documents/Final_RTC_2nd_Edition.pdf.

"Children are our main focus," said Maryland Department of Human Resources Secretary Brenda Donald. "We're proud to know that in comparison to other states, we rank at the top and that our laws in this realm are protect the most vulnerable among us."

The Maryland Legal Services Program within DHR is responsible for providing legal assistance for abused and neglected children.

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The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.